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ABSTRACT

A need exists for consideration of the variety of regional problems and characteristics in training junior college English teachers. A region's needs can be surveyed and met best by junior and four-year schools that are close enough together so that the two-year colleges can specify their needs and the four-year colleges can meet them. Before the start of Western Washington State College's M.A. program for junior college English teachers, 25 junior college English teachers from the area were invited to comment on the program. They recommended two internships--one early in the program and one at the end--to center on composition, one on transfer writing and one on developmental writing. On these teachers' recommendation that a junior college English teacher needed to learn student-centered techniques for teaching writing, the Macrorie approach to composition, "Telling Writing," was taught to the interns. The premises of this approach are that students are the best commentators on their peers' writing and that they can best learn to write if they write first about their own experience. Students worked as aides at Western before their internship. The program and the Macrorie approach were considered quite successful, especially in building self-confidence about writing. (KM)

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THE MA IS ENOUGH!

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Last year when visiting Bellevue Community College in Seattle where I was supervising an intern in Washington State College's program to train junior college English teachers, I sat working at an adjacent desk while she had a conference with a student who had come to ask for "more punishment on my papers."

Although I assume no masochistic motives have brought you to this forum on Graduate Programs and the Two-Year College Curriculum, I don't want to be the only one to punish you, since the other papers have been so lively and informative. So in order to avoid punishing repetitions I shall begin my own paper with two presumptions: 1) you have heard enough about the debate as to what constitutes the best junior college credential--the MA versus the EA 2) you have read the two most recent and significant recommendations on how junior college teachers of English ought to be trained in Worthen-Shugrue report and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Junior College Committee Guidelines. The annotated bibliography I am distributing indicates the basic arguments and a selected checklist of studies that lead me to my own presumptuous thesis: The MA is enough, but the National Study and the Junior College Guidelines do not go far enough in distinguishing the variety of regional problems in training junior college English teachers.

Even though the training recommendations of the Worthen-Shugrue and CCCC Junior College Committee generally hold, there are special emphases or distinctions that graduate departments have to recognize so that MA programs can be tailored to the needs of junior colleges in a given region. In fact I am beginning to think that one of the most helpful suggestions in the Junior College Committee's Guidelines is that regional centers be set up to search out openings and help place interns in the junior colleges. This recommendation implies that a region's needs can be surveyed and met best by junior and four-year schools who are close enough together so that the two-year colleges can specify their needs and the four-year schools meet them. For example, I have worked with junior college teachers in the Rocky Mountain region several times in the last three years; their concept of junior college English is transfer English. In many cases these Rocky Mountain junior colleges are branch colleges of state universities. In the Northwest, on the other hand, where two-year colleges are most often called "community colleges" not junior colleges, 66% of the students say they will eventually transfer to a four-year school but only 30% ever do. Technical and vocational training is therefore a major concern of the schools in my own Northwest region. Only recently are community colleges in the Northwest beginning to make close ties with four-year schools.

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Establishing close ties with junior colleges in a given region can greatly benefit an MA program. In fact, my discussion in this paper concerning the components of 1) internships and 2) composition in an MA program grow out of the cooperation Western has had with junior colleges in the Northwest. What I hope to show is how Western responded to regional needs; I shall not describe a model program because I don't believe a national model could exist. What I hope we have is a model attitude; and I certainly believe our program centered around internships and composition would have different emphasis if we were in another region of the country. At Western before the start of an EPDA grant, which launched our MA for junior college teachers, we invited 25 regional junior college English teachers to our campus in the spring of 1969 and asked them to critique our program and to comment especially on the internship component which the junior college teachers agreed was the heart of our new MA. They suggested two internships--one early in the two-year program, one at the end--so that the interns could come back to Western and add what they saw they needed in the way of additional work. That way they could go back to a junior college during their second internship and apply what they learned. Junior college teachers also suggested that both internships center on composition and that the interns' time be split between transfer and developmental writing. Originally we had supposed that the interns would teach one course in literature and one in composition during each of two internships. Literature courses, we quickly discovered, were the privileges of junior college instructors with seniority and were not handed out to interns.

In our program, the regular junior college instructor, who directed an intern, was released from a class to supervise. Released time gave the instructor time and incentive to meet with the intern frequently. Most junior college instructors we worked with preferred released time as pay rather than the small stipend we could have paid. I myself visited the campuses several times a quarter to sit in classes and to consult with intern and supervisor. At the end of the quarter, the supervising instructor wrote me a letter about the intern's performance. That letter specified how well the intern taught writing, what he needed in the way of further training, how he designed and held together a class over an entire term, and how well he related to individual students. In the case of the two youngest interns, their supervisors the first year found fault with their abilities to organize a course for an entire quarter--they complained the course was too fragmented and showed little sense of a pattern. So when the interns returned to Western, we spent time in the junior college English seminar on how to design a course with enough flexibility so that instructors could adjust to individual differences among their classes but also so that they had a longer-ranging view. Both young interns had greater senses of unity in their classes the second time around, a fact noted by the junior college supervisors and by me.

Spaced internships also allowed interns to return to Western and develop specialties, for specialties often helped the intern--soon to become a job candidate--discover the immediate needs of junior colleges. Until our interns had been out a quarter, for example, we hadn't known of the great need for teachers of reading in our region. So this past summer, we had a reading specialist from Shoreline Community College give us a nuts-and-bolts course in developmental reading; our interns practiced with students and the use of specialized equipment in a summer course at Shoreline.

In talking about internships then, I have implied a definition of the junior college English teacher in the Northwest as one who is anxious to help train future teachers who can more readily adjust to the realities of junior college English than he/she perhaps did.

On the basis of what the junior college teacher is, I find it ironic and frustrating to find many four-year college instructors who stereotype their junior college counterparts as heretics who corrupt the sacred texts entrusted them in graduate seminars. But what we found out from our very first meeting was that junior college teachers of English could turn any conversation into a discussion of the teaching of composition--the real junior college teacher beneath the stereotype of the heretic is a person who has happily accepted a lifetime sentence of reading student papers, as one of our junior college colleagues expressed it at that first meeting. The junior college teachers in the Northwest also expressed great dismay at what they were not doing in the teaching of writing.

They wanted teachers coming out of MA programs to have less difficulty adjusting to the new realities of composition just as they wanted their future colleagues to know how to adjust to the realities of the needs of junior college students and communities. They commonly agreed that they were searching for 1) writing techniques that were student-centered, 2) for an inductive atmosphere where learning to write could take place, and for 3) approaches that would give students confidence rather than fear in their own perceptions and voices. Since we at Western felt that the Macrorie approach to composition best fulfilled these three criteria, we trained our EPDA interns in Macrorie's Telling Writing before we sent them out to the junior colleges.

Before describing how we trained Western's interns, let me mention briefly the two major premises of Macrorie's approach. His first premise is that students are the best commentators on the writing of their peers. Macrorie encourages them to spot unfocused, undeveloped essays and show other students how to make improvements. Students soon develop a sense of themselves as members of a reading, listening, and evaluating community and gain confidence in their critical perceptions as well as respect for their own voices because they spend so much time listening to and discussing each other's papers. We have found that

such a procedure establishes a non-threatening atmosphere for critic, writer, and instructor as well as a concrete sense of audience for the writer.

As his second premise, Macrorie holds that students can best learn to write if they write first about their own experience, especially when they show rather than tell what the experience has held for them. Macrorie encourages students to respect what he calls "the language in you"--what you know best in your own colloquial style. In other words, Macrorie approaches positively the problem of artificiality and jargon in writing by providing immediate reinforcement from the audience when writing conveys personal experience with close observation, vividness, simplicity, and understated emotion or meaning. Macrorie continually encourages students not only to value their own voices and perceptions but also to trust the power of their colloquial languages.

Instead of placing our EPDA interns immediately into a classroom of their own, we had them work as aids for their first quarter on Western's campus with those experienced teachers of composition who already taught the Macrorie approach. The interns began by attending the class. After a time, they took a small group from the main body to discuss an assignment. They also met with students individually for conferences. At least once during the quarter they gave an assignment and followed it through the revision stages. The second quarter we enrolled 50 students in a composition class, then broke it into five separate groups. I taught one group and supervised the four interns in theirs. We met weekly to discuss the course and to concentrate on individual problems that each instructor faced. I attended their classes frequently to see how they were taught. The third quarter the interns went to the junior colleges and taught a 2/3 load. Each intern taught at least one course using Telling Writing during his internship.

It was in the junior colleges where the success of the training program was best measured; for even at the end of the first quarter of internship, student evaluations tailored especially to the Macrorie approach indicate the positive accomplishments: 1) the interns were student-centered, 2) learning had begun to occur in an inductive atmosphere, and 3) students had begun to trust their own voices and perceptions and even to alter previously negative attitudes toward writing. For example, one student answered the question, "What did you learn in this program that was new to you?" by saying that the instructor "showed me how to write interestingly" and how to "bring out my own voice." As students gained confidence, so did the interns teaching them. The intern who went out for her quarter with great promise but little self-assurance received a striking comment from a student about how she learned to trust her own voice. "In the beginning I felt (instructor's name) was not too confident, ...confidence grew, and her voice gained authority." Her junior

college supervisor and I happily noticed the same development in this intern that quarter.

The openness of the Macrorie experience, it seems to us, led to an openness of the students themselves when they came to write student evaluations of the course and instructor. For example, the intern who had the most teaching experience tended a little toward the autocratic in his teaching; but in using Macrorie, he talked less and listened more. One student observed about this person's junior college class, "We didn't spend the entire time listening to him--in fact I think he would rather have us talk. We talked about others' papers. The class wasn't a bore like many." About this same instructor a student said, "Since the course was on honest writing and about actual events in people's lives, he was helpful by being open with us."

That spending a term with Macrorie's approach altered some previously negative and ingrained attitudes toward writing is shown in other student comments. The first concerns the breaking of that artificial barrier between written and spoken language: "I don't believe I am any longer afraid of writing the way I speak." The second indicates that some students saw the approach as greatly differing from the writing notions they had previously known or had expected in a junior college writing class: "I was used to the teacher being specific in what she expected of you and I as the student doing what I thought would please her." Another student perceived that usage was an important but subordinate criterion for good writing: "It's getting across the idea that counts--grammar and the like aren't important; they can be improved upon later."

Perhaps the student who said in a written evaluation of one of Western's interns that he wouldn't ever take another English class, not even from this instructor, whom he liked, offered our program the compliment I like best. He said he would not take a writing course again "because english is my worse field." Nevertheless, he went on to praise the value of the course with the freshness and vigor of a good writer: "A new approach to english altogether--let me write about things I want and even enjoy once in a while--wrote about things that pretained to me and not about 'the motivating factor of a character in a book.'"

Like the student whose worse field is English, I would like to see MA programs that pertain--to the writing and reading needs of students in a given junior college region. And at the risk of undermining my own thesis on the need for regional considerations in the training of junior college teachers, I will risk a country-wide recommendation: we need less emphasis on graduate degrees that train candidates who are limited to talking about "the motivating factors of a character in a book."